

Living City

Presentation for the 2006 InSEA Congress, Viseu Portugal

(How three people from local government, industry and education managed to sustain and develop a program in urban design for young people.)

1.0. Preamble

1.1. *Brisbane, the “City” of Living City:*

1.2 *Brisbane is the capital city of Queensland. It is located in the extreme South East of the State of Queensland, Australia. The South East region also includes extensive coastal strip developments to the North and South that are the fastest growing in Australia. Planners are currently envisaging the emergence of a 200 km. strip city with Brisbane at its centre. Rapid population growth, water scarcity and the loss of sensitive coastal environments are among the major design challenges facing the city.*

2.0. Abstract

2.1. *Living City developed as a collaboration of teachers, local government planners, artists and design professionals. Its goals are to educate and empower young people about the design of democratic and sustainable public spaces, and consider the perceptions of young people about their city and its public spaces. The first program was developed as an initiative of the 1999 InSEA Congress in Brisbane and since then 5 more workshop programs have introduced year 11 students to themes and challenges in urban design. The program always targets active development sites in the city, uses design professionals as well as educators to mentor the workshop process and ensures that the ideas and views of young people are fed back to city authorities and developers.*

3.0. Rationale

3.1. Exciting new possibilities for cities to nurture creativity and support sustainable change are emerging in the 21st century. There is also a darker future where freedoms and amenities may be submerged in insensitive growth, unsustainable exploitation of resources and the alienation of public space.

3.2. Young people are citizens and the future consumers of the city and its public spaces. Their awareness and engagement (disengagement) will be critically important to the fate of public space, sustainable development, safe, energetic and creative cities. The more we can do as educators to promote active engagement the better. Art teachers shouldn't defer to anyone in developing pedagogy around built environment and public art. It's central to our role and, as a nexus between art, design, media and social sciences, a fertile breeding ground for cross-curriculum innovation.

3.3. By engaging with these challenges we can examine the role of public art and design in the contested domain of public space, and introduce students to the “slow” city, the city that reveals its poetry through idiosyncratic and unpredictable encounters, or with urban and public art that finds a way humanise public space – or urban design that connects, activates and invigorates the public realm physically, socially, culturally and even economically.

3.4. Critical literacy and creative intervention applied in the urgent context of changing urban spaces have together been the rationale of this program over the past 6 years.

4.0. Overview

4.1. This presentation explores the achievements and new directions of “Living City”. Living City is a project based on the premise that young people should be empowered to engage imaginatively with the design of sustainable and creative cities. The project, now in its seventh year of development, offers a model for interdisciplinary learning supported by professional mentors and stakeholders. The project seeks to continue its engagement with innovative learning by developing resources capable of reaching a wider educational audience, and by inviting international partners to participate in or link to future projects.

4.2. The program works by immersion in the issues and design possibilities of a “problem” site. Sites are selected because they are in transition; they have a past and a problematic but potentially creative future. Year 11 students, nominated from a network of State and non-State schools, are withdrawn from their classrooms and gathered in a workshop space close to the target site. They form creative teams and work together over three days to respond to the design challenges negotiated by their team. They

meet stakeholders and, with the help of professionals and industry mentors, negotiate contested and complementary values, needs and interests. In conceptualising the problem and finding solutions they must recognise and deal with the social, cultural and political dimensions of the design challenge.

5.0. Goals and Values

5.1. The project questions and critically examines the directions of future urban growth.

- It recognizes the contested values of public space and supports democratic engagement with design decisions.
- It focuses on the design of public space and the role of public art.
- The project aims to channel the creative design thinking of young people about public space to help build sustainable and democratic urban futures.
- It supports authentic learning and active citizenship through engagement with active projects, capable of change, amendment and debate.
- The project values the direct experience and needs of young people as “consumers” of public space.
- It aims to connect individual experiences with collective patterns of use through cultural mapping activities, reflection and critical analysis of public spaces.
- It aims to position young people as agents rather than consumers by encouraging creative input into decision-making.
- The project aims to foster a collaborative learning environment involving role-play, professional mentoring, team problem solving, dialogue and communication.

6.0. Retrospective

6.1. The project began life in InSEA 99, inspired in part by presentations on urban design and pedagogy by Dipak Lahiri and Katarina Lindgren of Sweden, (*Learning by urban studies: a project by secondary school students of Stockholm*), and by Dr Glenn Coumts of Scotland. (*Scanning the City.*)

6.2. Since the inaugural 99 event, Living City projects have targeted active and contested developments in the city of Brisbane.

- **1999 – Roma Street Parkland**; conversion of an inner city transport and commercial precinct into public parkland.
- **2000 Riveredge**; Reclaiming “lost” spaces of inner city river frontage.
- **2001; Re-Vision. Living City at KGSC**; Revising the public spaces of an inner city school
- **2003; Margins and Transitions; Kurilpa Point.** Transformation of a contested inner city precinct
- **2004; KGUV** building a future-oriented creative “village” near the CBD
- **2005; Square One**: re-inventing an icon, the symbolic city centre

6.3. Over time the program has evolved through a blend of pedagogical innovation and self-sustaining partnerships to create a niche in the calendar of Brisbane arts education events. It aspires to build on its experience and work with current and future partners to develop an educational resource open to a wider constituency of teachers and learners.

6.4. Each of the programs has produced resources that have been distributed to participating schools and in each case the student design outcomes have been fed back to decision makers and exhibited in a range of relevant forums.

7.0. Interdisciplinary Pedagogy

7.1. The program opens opportunities for both interdisciplinary learning and for building community and industry partnerships that deliver authentic learning. The content and themes of the program have the potential to integrate learning in Visual Art and Design as well as in Graphics, Technology, Study of Society and other branches of the curriculum.

7.2. In applications of the program in the curriculum of Kelvin Grove State College middle school for example, there has been a close collaboration among the Arts, Home Economics and Built Environment, as well as core studies subjects, Science and Maths.

7.3. In August 2005, 200 year 8 students participated in a three-day workshop program modelled on Living City and mentored by design professionals in the neighbouring Creative Industries campus of the Queensland University of Technology. In developing the 2004/2005 programs for Living City, a close relationship has been developed with the Creative Industries Faculty of this University leading to the co-development of a program in sustainable planning based on the Kelvin Grove Urban Village precinct. The social planning partners of this project, the Hornery Institute, have developed a pilot interactive resource for learning about sustainable planning targeted to the middle school curriculum in Study of Society, Technology and the Arts, and through 2006 the Living City team, in collaboration with the Hornery Institute, hopes to build a complementary resource model for learning in the wider context of city design and public space targeting senior secondary students.

7.4. Why is this project sitting inside arts curriculum? Why not in Technology, or Social Sciences? We have outlined the existing interdisciplinary elements of the program, however a more fundamental response involves thinking about the future role of arts curriculum and arts programs in the senior secondary. Our experience with this program affirms that the serious issues of planning, design and ownership of public space have a place in mainstream arts curriculum as inspiration or generator of ideas and that the creative responses of students and the possibility to work with public artists and designers is an energising and empowering learning model.

7.5. While achieving a “fit” to existing curriculum was never a prime preoccupation of the program, it is important that art curriculum meets the challenge of arts in practice in the real world, including the major challenge of sustainable design and creative cities, in order to maintain its continued relevance in the curriculum. As well as “pure” art studies and individual expression through visual arts, there is a place for this other kind of creative production, as a subset of arts curriculum or in collaboration with other curriculum.

7.6. The implications for arts pedagogy and for assessment and certification should be considered.

7.7. In visual art pedagogy there is a preoccupation with individual creative production and the unique relationship between student and teacher/mentor. The Living City learning experience emphasises dialogue and team production. It de-emphasises individual creative process in favour of collective process. Its creative product is concerned with communication of ideas rather than aesthetic excellence and individual expression. In addition to the teacher/mentor relationship, it offers dialogue and role models from the real world of design, and includes the direct contact and stimulus of art-workers in the field of public art and design. Striking the right mix of individual and group creative production could be a necessary corollary of relevant and sustainable future arts curriculum.

7.8. In assigning credit to project based learning, it is important that the assessment and accreditation systems in schools are flexible enough to embrace interdisciplinary programs such as this. This may imply a change in culture of centralised curriculum authorities from devising fairly proscriptive discipline-based curriculum and assessment frameworks to a mix of curriculum models including accreditation of proven programs such as this one. There are signs that this culture is changing in our own State with the Queensland Schools Authority devising more individualised assessment profiling for students. There are also contrary pressures with increasingly proscriptive curriculum regimes promoting core curriculum, benchmark testing in English, Maths and Science and school accreditation and funding tied to competitive results in these areas. The federal government in Australia is building pressure on State and local educational bodies to overhaul curriculum in this kind of “back to basics” reform framework.

7.9 The rich learning that no doubt arises through the Living City event has not been formally assessed or credited so far, however, as suggested earlier, the Queensland School Authority is reviewing, and to some extent de-regulating, its assessment and certification process. It's feasible and desirable that, for example in the context of an excellence or extension art curriculum, project participation, as well as the degree and excellence of individual engagement, could be credited and certified at exit as part of a student's assessment portfolio. This area of extension or excellence projects embedded in mainstream arts syllabus, as opposed to school based subjects, is worth thinking about. The major attraction of grounding elements of the program in authentic contexts is evident. There is also room for the development of an extension or excellence curriculum to support mainstream arts learning, again based on the contact with arts industries, authentic context, contact and collaboration with arts mentors in community projects and the like, exemplified in projects such as this.

7.10 A final thought on curriculum in a local context. Our current senior curriculum assesses both making art and reflecting on the historical and theoretical context of art. The “appraising” or theoretical discussion is perhaps the most problematic element for both students and teachers because it inevitably

involves the practice and conventions of written genres that are also repeatedly tested in other parts of the curriculum. Living City encourages dialogue about the complex contexts for public art and design. It prioritises extemporised and structured oral communication in presenting and defending design ideas. Is there a model here that is transferable to the mainstream, or even a niche for arts curriculum? Certainly the notion of promoting articulate and focussed public speech and debate is a skill that is central to arts practice and one that is comparatively neglected in existing curriculum.

8.0. Building Social Capital

8.1. Society is made up of social beings rather than economic beings. The maximization of the short-term advantage purported in most economic models and the self-interest and competition that ensues would tend work in opposition to fostering social connections and society as a whole (Cox, 1995).

8.2. Social capital refers to these social connections amongst individuals – the social networks and the norms of reciprocity, mutual trust and shared values that arise from them (Putnam, 1993).

8.3. This is recognised in the Living City program through its process and potential outcomes. The program links with a participatory democratic framework of project-specific communication between the Local Authority, Brisbane City Council, and the broader community. The program offers a platform for sharing and understanding different kinds of knowledge – technical, scientific and local – the latter often from a number of differing local, social and cultural viewpoints. Layered into this are the perceptions and personal knowledge of the workshop participants, with no single form of knowledge privileged over the other.

The sharing of knowledge amongst the group, facilitators and stakeholders, active debate and discussion contributes to a shared understanding and clarification of local issues and synthesis of common and provocative threads for exploration. This environment facilitates ‘binding social capital’ amongst the group through the development of a shared understanding of each other and a shared commitment to values, goals and a means to achieving them. ‘Bridging’ social capital is also achieved by connecting the group with diverse knowledge of others – including local stakeholders and expert systems – allowing for the input of others and providing a setting for knowledge to be challenged, discussed, understood and mutually respected.

8.4. In terms of social capital, the program’s process is more important than the outcomes themselves, however collective design strategies and the vision of student participants in responding to a site and a set of issues should be viewed as a valuable contribution to local government from a section of society not often accessed for their input.

9.0. Nuts and Bolts

9.1. Learning in Living City is framed by the following conditions and criteria:

- Valuing/recognising prior knowledge and experience (essential to the cultural mapping component of the task)
- Negotiation of tasks
- Withdrawal from normal classroom environment
- Short sharp and heavily resourced bursts of immersion in one task/one focus (Rich Task)
- Working in a creative team (learners and mentors)
- Learning across discipline and curriculum boundaries
- Exposure to multiple voices and viewpoints
- Very high level of support from presenters and mentors drawn from the world of industry and from community stakeholders
- High level intellectual challenge; multi factorial problems framed by authentic context
- Constant challenge, review, revision of concepts and of the learning process.
- Individual feedback; group feedback and critique.
- Presentation of team concepts to an audience of peers and adult mentors in a non-competitive but rigorously argued forum.
- Feedback to stakeholders

9.2. The model complements classroom learning and is transferable in a wide range of contexts. It can provide learners with deeper engagement and higher order thinking about concepts and problems. The immersion phase modelled in Living City can continue to fuel longer-term independent or traditional class based learning.

10.0. Format

10.1. The event targets year 11 students (senior secondary), usually from 15-16 years, in a network of State and Non-State schools. Most participating schools are located in the city or in the south east corner of the State. Participating students are withdrawn from regular classes over a three day period to meet in a workshop space with organizers and mentors. So far the majority of participants have been nominated from visual arts subjects, however there have been a number from social science subjects.

11.0. Process

11.1. The overall challenge involves rethinking and re-designing elements of public space in the sites under review. Participants are assigned to teams of 4-5, and through the event undergo team orientation, role-plays, site investigation using objective analysis and cultural mapping, artists' workshops, discussion with stakeholders, and creative design sessions.

11.2. A feature of the program is the imperative to work quickly, improvise visual responses and regularly communicate team ideas. The process of team presentation is informal, however each team is withdrawn at least once for a more intensive review and discussion session by design mentors and professionals. They are expected to respond to challenges, and consider multiple dimensions of the design problem.

11.3. Each team is expected to make a final design presentation on day three, and the audience in most cases includes a wider spectrum of stakeholders, mentors, teachers and peers.

11.4. The process and outcomes are documented over the event and outcomes are exhibited in a range of forums. Team ideas are presented to the developers and decision-makers in the context of the site.

12.0. Connecting to Queensland Curriculum

12.1. The process embodied in Living City promotes many key teaching and learning elements valued by contemporary curriculum, including creative team, interdisciplinary learning and authentic contexts for learning. It promotes higher order thinking through the dialectic challenge/response model, emphasizes verbal communication and multi-literacies. (Participating students express responses verbally, as well as through text, sketch, map, photographic and digital imaging, diagrams, 3D models etc.)

12.2. In 2006 a reappraisal of the senior arts curriculum will be conducted by the Queensland Schools Authority (QSA) that may lead to a further de-regulation of curriculum content and greater flexibility in assessment. We hope to find a niche for programs such as Living City in the revised curriculum, particularly in the context of optional studies in an extension or excellence program.

13.0. Curriculum integration.

13.1. Our student participants are very enthusiastic about their involvement in the program, but ambivalent about integrating it into their school assessment program. We share their hesitation, but feel there is a model for assessment or quality control that could lead to credit in art and design courses without further pressure on students or on already crowded curriculum choice. As already stated, there is a need to negotiate this model with the QSA. We do feel that the relationships we model with professional designers and artists needs to be prolonged through more extended mentorships and school placements, possibly through a school of excellence model, and preferably supported by a strong commitment from tertiary partners, industry, professional organizations and government bodies – particularly the Public Art Agency.

13.2. Our program has demonstrated the need for diversity in the educational program and the rich opportunities and advantages of tapping into professional networks. Crowded curriculum leaves little time for experiment, however we would advocate more regular and strategic immersion programs in schools to deliver authentic learning. Opportunities do exist in spaces between the rush to assess and tick off content. In the rich tasks of New Basics programs for example, the withdrawal of students for cross curriculum workshops is not only feasible, but is strongly aligned with its educational mission. Future schooling models need to be flexible enough to encompass programs like Living City.

13.3. Our model, while not a curriculum package, could be evolved by teachers in other contexts and in other disciplines.

14.0. Partnerships

14.1. The program has evolved and survived through the support of partners, and exemplifies the potential for community partnerships to support educational initiatives. Over recent years the planning team has recognised the need to widen the base of support and to allow the program to evolve in different directions. The ongoing support of Education Queensland's Artist in residence Art built-in program and the support of the Kelvin Grove Urban Village urban sustainability education project are critical in this respect. Over the life of the project, the planning team has sought partners from the spectrum of community, industry and professional design community as well as from the secondary and tertiary education sectors. A critical role has been played by public artists and designer mentors.

14.2. Among these partners, we can acknowledge the following:

- *Govt Agencies and Education:* Education Queensland, QUT, Creative Industries, Kelvin Grove Urban Village, BCC Planning Branch, Year of Built Environment Awards Scheme, 2004, Public Art Agency, Southbank Corporation, BEE Faculty, QUT, Queensland Department of Housing.
- *Industry/community:* Powerhouse (Ideas at the Powerhouse), Hornery Institute, Social Planning, Verge Urban Landscape Architecture, West End Resident's Group, West End Community Centre, Architectus and Davenport Campbell Architects, Plan C. Social Planners.
- *Professional:* Queensland Art Teachers Association, Royal Australian Institute of Urban Design.

14.3. On a personal note, we can say that the most significant partnership is the one we have built ourselves and that has taken us to this forum a long way from home. If we can testify to anything it is to the enormous professional and personal value of cultivating such partners.

15.0 Funding

15.1 Obviously funding is a major issue in the continuance of any collaborative program. Our costs have varied slightly from one event to the next, however over six years, approximately \$60,000 has been raised to support the event, produce materials and resources and support exhibitions of outcomes. In an increasingly user-pays environment, the program has so far been delivered at no cost to schools or participating students.

15.2. To date a relatively small percentage of this funding has come from the Education sector through grants and awards. We aspire to a more permanent funding relationship in this area. The partners in each event and the network of professional associations have contributed fairly generous in-kind or pro-bono support, however the bulk of funding to date has come from the City Planning Branch of Brisbane City Council in line with its support of youth consultation and active citizenship. For this we are very grateful, however we have also been very proactive in pursuing other sources of funding for each event and they have been quite diverse, as indicated in our acknowledgments.

15.3. Genuine future partnerships imply equitable sharing of costs. The ideal is obviously to have a guaranteed source of funds for a given period of operation, and we hope to pursue this goal in 2006. Our partnership with the Hornery Institute at Kelvin Grove Urban Village and its commitment to the support the development of an online teaching learning resource is a promising development.

16.0. Aspirations; 2006 and beyond.

16.1. In brief, we aspire to present the Living City model and its resources to a wider educational audience.

16.2. Our short-term goals are to present the pedagogy and the interdisciplinary learning model to arts educators in wider forums such as this. We also plan to conduct a 2006 Living City event in September targeting educators rather than students, introducing and road testing some of the content of our proposed online resource development.

16.3. We plan to invest the funding and technical support of our partners in 2006 to the development and trial of a pilot educational resource targeted to senior secondary student and sitting inside arts technology and social science curriculum.

16.4. We will encourage the development by our curriculum and assessment body, the QSA, to include credit for events such as Living City in the certification of students engaged in excellence or extension programs. We hope to work with QSA to make this more flexible portfolio approach to assessment workable.

16.5. We also encourage and invite partners from this and other forums to extend the scope of Living City to include interaction across regional and perhaps international boundaries.

17.0. Conclusion

17.1. Thanks for allowing us to share our experiences of this project with you. We hope our presentation has touched some chords with listeners, particularly in the context of the InSEA congress theme of interdisciplinary learning. As a project that began its life through the Brisbane InSEA congress of 1999, it's fitting that we conclude by inviting suggestions on its future direction. In particular we ask for dialogue about shared experiences with projects of a similar scope and theme. If there is a sister event themed around urban design and art, we would certainly like to hear more. We would also like to think that Living City will continue its life in some form or other over the next three years and look forward to reporting on future developments and sharing whatever resources emerge from our collaborations.

17.2. We'd like to close by acknowledging our supporters, but also the initial inspiration for our own event that came from Dipak Lahiri, Katarina Lindgren and Glenn Coutts, presenters to the 1999 InSEA Congress

Further reading/web research:

Cox, E. 1995. **Boyer Lectures: A Truly Civil Society**. (Transcript ABC Radio National, Australian Broadcasting Commission, Sydney.)

Putnsam, R. 1993. **Making Democracy Work, Civic traditions in Modern Italy**, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ.

Dolores Hayden: **A Field Guide to Sprawl**

Jan Gehl: **Life between Buildings**

Richard Florida: **Rise of the Creative Class**

Fred Kent + William H Whyte: **Projects for Public Spaces**

Aaron Betsky and Erik Adigard's manifestos, **Architecture Must Burn**

Marjetica Potrc: **Next Stop, Kiosk**

Kathy Madden: **5 Ways to a Great Place**

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